

The Broken Trail

Presents:

Ignorance is Bliss

by Mark Nelms



We Christians spend a lot of energy trying to figure out what God's plan for our life is. Bookstores are full of studies that teach us how to study! And pray and worship and fast and go on pilgrimages that will "change us". Churches and groups periodically 'retreat' to try to hear from God. We worry about life and if we have the right job and will we marry the right person and did we do the right thing. The Bible itself talks a lot about seeking God for wisdom; I found more than 50 references in just a quick scan. One in particular, James 1:5, tells us to ask because God gives generously without conditions. So why do we struggle with it so much? Are we doing something wrong? Let's take these traditional methods and look at some of the Bible "Biggies" to see if we can gain some insight about 'walking the path' from them.

Miracles: Evidence of God's power or presence does not give you a sense of His direction. Moses and the Israelites watched God perform miracle after miracle to bring Egypt to its knees then destroy the mightiest army on earth with a single breath, only to build a golden idol and worship a nonexistent god as soon as they were left alone!

Study/knowledge: Look at Saul who would become Paul and write half the New Testament. Great learning led him to be the greatest persecutor of early Christians we know of. Or look at the Pharisees – the Bible scholars of their time – who watched Jesus call on God's name to heal and pronounced it a work of evil!

Knowing the goal - Abram (Abraham): Informed by God he was chosen to be the father of a new spiritual people, he was told to separate and go to a new country where he would have favor and blessings. So he goes to: Egypt, Bethel, Hebron, back to Damascus, returns to Bethel, Hebron again, Damascus again, back to Hebron. Lots of activity but no nation has been fathered yet, so Abram and Sarah help God out by having a child by proxy (allowed under the laws of the time) and Ishmael is born. God repeats his promise to Abram and renames him Abraham. Many more years pass. Only when Abraham and Sarah are too old to have children is Issac born and Abraham does not live to see his children become a nation. But they do.

Abraham didn't know it, but he was demonstrating why God rarely tells me what's going on. It's because when I *think* He does, I try to make it happen! Usually by practicing 'multiple-choice religion' (meaning that I keep trying different things until *something* happens – and then figure that means it must be what God wanted!).

Faith - Joseph: and his coat of many colors – one of my favorite stories as a child. Jacob's favored son, his brothers sold him into slavery, where he was given responsibility over the slaves because of his administrative skill, but was also good-looking so his master's wife hit on him. Joseph did "right" and resisted her advances, so the "woman scorned" lied and he was thrown in jail. But then became favored in the jail and put in charge of the prisoners. With so much faith in his conversations with God he eagerly wagered his life on God telling him what Pharaoh's dreams meant. So he goes from prison to second-in-command in Egypt and ends up with the entire family reunited and happy in Egypt. It would be a great ending if not for the fact that their reunion would be punctuated later by spending 400 years in slavery to the Egyptians.

Prayer - Paul: Surely we can consider Paul a prayer warrior! Let's face it, he had plenty of time for prayer considering how much time he spent in jail while on his crusades for the Lord. But Paul tells us clearly that he's in the dark about God's plan in Acts 20:22 when he says, "*and now, compelled by the spirit I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen there.*"

A close, intimate walk with the Lord: is truly wonderful; but it won't tell you where he's going. Look at all the lunacy the disciples went through with Jesus right there with them. Did they EVER understand one of his stories without him explaining it? And after 3 years of daily interaction they had no idea where he was going or why. One of them even turned him over to the authorities as a threat to religion.

It isn't my intention to make light of the sufferings of our forefathers; only to point out that some of the lessons they can teach us may be hard to see because they don't match what we're looking for. We want a cut-and-dried answer that we can imitate to bring the same level of success to our own lives. But if we look closely we see that rarely did any of them have any more idea what was going on than we do! No matter how great their contribution to God's plan - they all struggled when it came to the decisions involved in walking everyday life.

The fact is – we aren't usually supposed to know what's going to happen. When the Bible speaks of wisdom it's talking about how and why you act; what the motives of your heart are. It isn't talking about knowing of the future. The Bible is pretty clear that the future is not for man to know.

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*Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring (Proverbs 27:1)
the fool multiplies words. No one knows what is coming. (Ecclesiastes 10:14)
Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. (James 4:14)*

Not even the Old Testament prophets knew the future. They were messengers, not fortune tellers.

But take heart! That the Bible patriarchs were as fallible as we is a cause for hope: it means we're all in the same boat! And it points us at the real truth about God's plans for mankind and for each of us. They are GOD'S plans and they will unfold with, without, or in spite of our help. Or even our knowledge.

Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself? Do you have an arm like God's, and can your voice thunder like his? (God speaking to Job 40:8-9)

Personally, I find this comforting. It makes it much easier when Jesus says, "follow me" for me to just start walking without asking where we're going and suggesting alternate routes! What we CAN say about these characters is that they did seem to get the hang of things after enough messes had broken that fallen nature tendency to be in control out of them. Thankfully, so can we. And hopefully without requiring God to lay the proverbial 'bolt of lightning' on us!

There is one other Biblical figure we need to look at – for he is the only one that truly walked God's path all his life. In modern English, we call him Jesus and his very presence on Earth split all of history. We killed him, of course. But man's death cannot overcome God's life so he stayed dead only long enough to remove all its power over us. So what kind of walk did Jesus portrait for us and what can we learn from it?

He walked without fear. He went everywhere and anywhere regardless of popularity or consequence. He touched sick and well alike and gave comfort wherever it was needed, but never by skipping around the truth just because the audience wouldn't like it. He never held back and gave his whole heart whether it was received or not. He always trusted God to make everything right. (Pr 29:25 *Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe*)

He was intimate with God. He usually referred to him as 'my father' and often withdrew from others to be alone with him. In every record we have of him, the Father permeates his thoughts and words. The stories he told were often about our relationship to the Father. His love for Father God fills his prayers, and he even tells us that our love for him comes from God the Father; (Jn 8:42) *If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own, but He sent me.*

Where he was going did not seem as important as the people he met going there. The gospels are full of examples of Jesus turning aside from his path to be with someone who needed him. Of people who sent for him and he came; of healings and teachings and fellowship and just sitting down to eat with people. Maybe the most descriptive examples, though, are seen during our most horrendous behavior. Now folks, I don't know about you; but if I were beaten and forced to carry a big, heavy beam to my own execution, my thoughts would probably be so focused on what lay at the end of the road that I wouldn't even see anybody along the way. But take a look at Luke 23 and you'll find that Jesus was teaching them. Once crucified, he spent what little breath he had asking the Father (there is the intimacy again) to forgive the people killing him. Then later promising life to a criminal who deserved death. And his last words? A gift of his spirit to God the Father – an incredible offering of love and a statement of trust.

So what do we see? We see that **Jesus gave his heart long before he gave his body.** For 30+ years before he said it to us, he showed us that you give to others from the overflow of your own heart. *The good man gives good things from his heart; the bad man gives bad from his heart, the hurt man gives hurt from his heart, and the man in love with God gives God and love from his heart.* (Lk 6:45, my paraphrase) Study, miracles, prayer, worship; all these things are good, but they are only tools.

The goal is to fill your heart with God the Father.

Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life. (Pr 4:23, my emphasis)

The Bottom line? Ignorance is bliss! After all, God didn't create you or I to run the universe! He created us to live. So LIVE! Trust the Father to unfold His plan as He wills (that's happening with or without our approval!). As for the plan for your life, if you truly want the abundant Life God planned for you then don't worry too much about whether to turn left or right. Just

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keep your eyes focused on God the Father. And maybe one day you and I will echo Jesus, *“I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can only do what he sees the Father doing “*

(Jn 5:19)